

The Tale of How Ivan Ivanovitch Quarrelled with Ivan Nikiforovitch



I

Ivan Ivanovitch and Ivan Nikiforovitch

IVAN IVANOVITCH has a splendid *bekesh*!* Superb! And what astrakhan! Phew, damn it all, what astrakhan! Purplish-grey with a frost on it! I'll bet anything you please that nobody can be found with one like it! Now do just look at it—particularly when he is standing talking to somebody—look from the side: isn't it delicious? There is no finding words for it. Velvet! Silver! Fire! Merciful Lord! Nikolay the Wonder-worker, holy saint! Why have not I a *bekesh* like that! He had it made before Agafya Fedosyevna went to Kiev. You know Agafya Fedosyevna, who bit off the tax-assessor's ear?

An excellent man is Ivan Ivanovitch! What a house he has in Mirgorod! There's a porch all round it on oak posts, and there are seats under the porch everywhere. When the weather is too hot, Ivan Ivanovitch casts off his *bekesh* and his nether garments, remaining in nothing but his shirt, and rests under his porch watching what is passing in the yard and in the street. What apple-trees and pear-trees he has under his very windows! You only open the window—and the branches fairly thrust themselves into the room. That is all in the front of the house; but you should just see what he has in the garden at the back! What has he not there? Plums, cherries white and black, vegetables of all sorts, sunflowers, cucumbers, melons, peas, even a threshing barn and a forge.

An excellent man is Ivan Ivanovitch! He is very fond of a melon: it is his favourite dish. As soon as he has dined and come

* A short coat made of fur or astrakhan. (*Translator's note.*)

out into the porch, wearing nothing but his shirt, he at once bids Gapka bring him two melons, and with his own hands cuts them into slices, collects the seeds in a special piece of paper and begins eating them. And then he tells Gapka to bring the ink-stand, and with his own hand writes an inscription on the paper containing the seeds: 'This melon was eaten on such and such a date.' If some visitor happens to be there, he adds: 'So and so was present.'

The late Mirgorod judge always looked at Ivan Ivanovitch's house with admiration. Yes, the little house is very nice. What I like is that barns and sheds have been built on every side of it, so that if you look at it from a distance, there is nothing to be seen but roofs, lying one over another, very much like a plateful of pancakes or even more like those funguses that grow upon a tree. All the roofs are thatched with reeds, however; a willow, an oak-tree and two apple-trees lean their spreading branches on them. Little windows with carved and white-washed shutters peep through the trees and run out even into the street.

An excellent man is Ivan Ivanovitch! The Poltava Commissar, Dorosh Tarasovitch Puhivotchka, knows him too; when he comes from Horol, he always goes to see him. And whenever the chief priest, Father Pyotr, who lives at Koliberda, has half a dozen visitors, he always says that he knows no one who fulfils the duty of a Christian and knows how to live as Ivan Ivanovitch does.

Goodness, how time flies! He had been a widower ten years even then. He had no children. Gapka has children and they often run about the yard. Ivan Ivanovitch always gives each of them a bread-ring, a slice of melon or a pear. His Gapka carries the keys of the cupboards and cellars; but the key of the big chest standing in his bedroom, and of the middle cupboard, Ivan Ivanovitch keeps himself, and he does not like anyone to go to them. Gapka is a sturdy wench, she goes about in a *zapaska*,* with fine healthy calves and fresh cheeks.

* A Little Russian garment consisting of two separate pieces of material, like two aprons, one worn in front and one at the back, making a skirt slit up to the waist and there held together by a girdle. (*Translator's note.*)

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And what a devout man Ivan Ivanovitch is! Every Sunday he puts on his *bekesh* and goes to church. When he goes in Ivan Ivanovitch bows in all directions and then usually instals himself in the choir and sings a very good bass. When the service is over, Ivan Ivanovitch cannot bear to go away without making the round of the beggars. He would, perhaps, not care to go through this tedious task, if he were not impelled to it by his innate kindness. 'Good morrow, poor woman!' he commonly says, seeking out the most crippled beggar-woman in a tattered gown made up of patches. 'Where do you come from, poor thing?'

'I've come from the hamlet, kind sir; I've not had a drop to drink or a morsel to eat for three days; my own children turned me out.'

'Poor creature! what made you come here?'

'Well, kind sir, I came to ask alms, in case anyone would give me a copper for bread.'

'H'm! Then I suppose you want bread?' Ivan Ivanovitch usually enquires.

'Indeed and I do! I am as hungry as a dog.'

'H'm!' Ivan Ivanovitch usually replies, 'so perhaps you would like meat too?'

'Indeed and I'll be glad of anything your honour may be giving me.'

'H'm! Is meat better than bread?'

'Is it for a hungry beggar to be choosing? Whatever you kindly give, sure, it's all good.' With this the old woman usually holds out her hand.

'Well, go along and God be with you,' says Ivan Ivanovitch. 'What are you staying for? I am not beating you, am I?'

And after addressing similar enquiries to a second and a third, he at last returns home or goes to drink a glass of vodka with his neighbour, Ivan Nikiforovitch, or to see the judge or the police-captain.

Ivan Ivanovitch is very much pleased if anyone gives him a present, or any little offering. He likes that very much.

Ivan Nikiforovitch is a very good man, too. His garden is next door to Ivan Ivanovitch's. They are such friends as the world has

never seen. Anton Prokofyevitch Golopuz, who goes about to this day in his cinnamon-coloured coat with light blue sleeves, and dines on Sundays at the judge's, used frequently to say that the devil himself had tied Ivan Nikiforovitch and Ivan Ivanovitch together with a string; where the one went the other would turn up also.

Ivan Nikiforovitch has never been married. Though people used to say he was going to be married, it was an absolute falsehood. I know Ivan Nikiforovitch very well and can say that he has never had the faintest idea of getting married. What does all this gossip spring from? For instance, it used to be rumoured that Ivan Nikiforovitch was born with a tail. But this invention is so absurd, and at the same time disgusting and improper, that I do not even think it necessary to disprove it to enlightened readers, who must doubtless be aware that none but witches, and only very few of them, in fact, have a tail. Besides, witches belong rather to the female than to the male sex.

In spite of their great affection, these rare friends were not at all alike. Their characters can be best understood by comparison. Ivan Ivanovitch has a marvellous gift for speaking extremely pleasantly. Goodness! how he speaks! Listening to him can only be compared with the sensation you have when someone is searching your head, or gently passing a finger over your heel. One listens and listens and hangs one's head. It is pleasant! Extremely pleasant! like a nap after bathing. Ivan Nikiforovitch, on the other hand, is rather silent. But if he does rap out a word, one must look out, that's all! He is more cutting than any razor. Ivan Ivanovitch is spare and tall; Ivan Nikiforovitch is a little shorter, but makes up for it in breadth. Ivan Ivanovitch's head is like a radish, tail downwards; Ivan Nikiforovitch's head is like a radish, tail upwards. Ivan Ivanovitch only lies in the porch in his shirt after dinner; in the evening he puts on his *bekesh* and goes off somewhere, either to the town shop which he supplies with flour, or into the country to catch quail. Ivan Nikiforovitch lies all day long on his steps usually with his back to the sun—if it is not too hot a day—and he does not care to go anywhere. If the whim

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takes him in the morning, he will walk about the yard, see how things are going in the garden and the house, and then go back to rest again. In old days he used to go round to Ivan Ivanovitch sometimes. Ivan Ivanovitch is an exceedingly refined man, he never utters an improper word in gentlemanly conversation, and takes offence at once if he hears one. Ivan Nikiforovitch is sometimes not so circumspect. Then Ivan Ivanovitch usually gets up from his seat and says: 'That's enough, that's enough, Ivan Nikiforovitch; we had better make haste out into the sun instead of uttering such ungodly words.' Ivan Ivanovitch is very angry if a fly gets into his beetroot soup: he is quite beside himself then—he will leave the plateful, and his host will catch it. Ivan Nikiforovitch is exceedingly fond of bathing, and when he is sitting up to his neck in water, he orders the table and the samovar to be set in the water too, and is very fond of drinking tea in such refreshing coolness. Ivan Ivanovitch shaves his beard twice a week; Ivan Nikiforovitch only once. Ivan Ivanovitch is exceedingly inquisitive. God forbid that you should begin to tell him about something and not finish the story! If he is displeased with anything, he lets you know it. It is extremely difficult to tell from Ivan Nikiforovitch's face whether he is pleased or angry; even if he is delighted at something he will not show it. Ivan Ivanovitch is rather of a timorous character. Ivan Nikiforovitch, on the other hand, wears trousers with such ample folds that if they were blown out you could put the whole courtyard with the barns and barn-buildings into them. Ivan Ivanovitch has big expressive snuff-coloured eyes and a mouth rather like the letter V; Ivan Nikiforovitch has little yellowish eyes completely lost between his thick eyebrows and chubby cheeks, and a nose that looks like a ripe plum. If Ivan Ivanovitch offers you snuff, he always first licks the lid of the snuff-box, then taps on it with his finger, and, offering it to you, says, if you are someone he knows: 'May I make so bold as to ask you to help yourself, sir?' Or if you are someone he does not know: 'May I make so bold as to ask you to help yourself, sir, though I have not the honour of knowing your name and your father's and your rank in the service?'

Ivan Nikiforovitch puts his horn of snuff straight into your hands and merely adds: 'Help yourself.' Both Ivan Ivanovitch and Ivan Nikiforovitch greatly dislike fleas, and so neither Ivan Ivanovitch nor Ivan Nikiforovitch ever let a Jew dealer pass without buying from him various little bottles of an elixir protecting them from those insects, though they abuse him soundly for professing the Jewish faith. In spite of some dissimilarities, however, both Ivan Ivanovitch and Ivan Nikiforovitch are excellent persons.

II

*From which may be learned the object of Ivan
Ivanovitch's desire, the subject of a conversation between
Ivan Ivanovitch and Ivan Nikiforovitch, and in
what way it ended*

One morning—it was in July—Ivan Ivanovitch was lying under his porch. The day was hot, the air was dry and quivering. Ivan Ivanovitch had already been out into the country to see the mowers and the farm, had already questioned the peasants and the women he met whence they had come, where they were going, how, and when, and why; he was terribly tired and lay down to rest. As he lay down, he looked round at the storehouses, the yard, the barns, the hens running about the yard, and thought to himself: 'Good Lord, what a manager I am! What is there that I have not got? Fowls, buildings, barns, everything I want, herb and berry vodka; pears and plum-trees in my orchard; poppies, cabbage, peas in my kitchen-garden . . . What is there that I have not got? . . . I should like to know what there is I have not got.'

After putting so profound a question to himself, Ivan Ivanovitch sank into thought; meanwhile, his eyes were in search of a new object, and, passing over the fence into Ivan Nikiforovitch's yard, were involuntarily caught by a curious spectacle. A lean peasant-woman was carrying out disused clothes that had been stored away, and hanging them out on a line to air. Soon an old uniform with frayed facings stretched its sleeves out in the air and embraced a brocade blouse; after it, a gentleman's dress-coat

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with a crest on the buttons and a moth-eaten collar displayed itself behind it; white cashmere trousers, covered with stains, which had once been drawn over the legs of Ivan Nikiforovitch, though now they could scarcely have been drawn on his fingers. After them other garments in the shape of an inverted V were suspended, then a dark-blue Cossack tunic which Ivan Nikiforovitch had had made twenty years before when he had been preparing to enter the militia and was already letting his moustaches grow. At last, to put the finishing touch, a sword was displayed that looked like a spire sticking up in the air. Then the skirts of something resembling a full-coat fluttered, grass-green in colour and with copper buttons as big as a five-kopeck piece. From behind peeped a waistcoat trimmed with gold lace and cut low in front. The waistcoat was soon concealed by the old petticoat of a deceased grandmother with pockets in which one could have stowed a watermelon. All this taken together made up a very interesting spectacle for Ivan Ivanovitch, while the sunbeams, catching here and there a blue or a green sleeve, a red facing or a bit of gold brocade, or playing on the sword-spire, turned it into something extraordinary, like the show played in the villages by strolling vagrants, when a crowd of people closely packed looks at King Herod in his golden crown or at Anton leading the goat. Behind the scenes the fiddle squeaks; a gypsy claps his hands on his lips by way of a drum, while the sun is setting and the fresh coolness of the southern night imperceptibly creeps closer to the fresh shoulders and bosoms of the plump village-women.

Soon the old woman emerged from the store-room, sighing and groaning as she hauled along an old-fashioned saddle with broken stirrups, with shabby leather cases for pistols, and a saddle-cloth that had once been crimson embroidered in gold and with copper discs. 'She is a silly woman!' thought Ivan Ivanovitch, 'she'll pull out Ivan Nikiforovitch himself to air next!'

And indeed Ivan Ivanovitch was not entirely mistaken in this surmise. Five minutes later Ivan Nikiforovitch's nankeen trousers were swung up, and filled almost half of the courtyard. After that she brought out his cap and his gun.

'What is the meaning of it?' thought Ivan Ivanovitch. 'I have never seen a gun at Ivan Nikiforovitch's. What does he want with that? He never shoots, but keeps a gun! What use is it to him? But it is a nice thing! I have been wanting to get one like that for a long time past. I should very much like to have that nice gun; I like to amuse myself with a gun. Hey, woman!' Ivan Ivanovitch shouted, beckoning to her.

The old woman went up to the fence.

'What's that you have got there, granny?'

'You see yourself—a gun.'

'What sort of gun?'

'Who can say what sort! If it were mine, I might know, maybe, what it is made of; but it is the master's.'

Ivan Ivanovitch got up and began examining the gun from every point of view, and even forgot to scold the old woman for hanging it and the sword to air.

'It's made of iron, one would think,' the old woman went on.

'H'm! made of iron. Why is it made of iron?' Ivan Ivanovitch said to himself. 'Has your master had it long?'

'Maybe he has.'

'It's a fine thing!' Ivan Ivanovitch went on. 'I'll ask him for it. What can he do with it? Or I'll swop something for it. I say, granny, is your master at home?'

'Yes.'

'What is he doing, lying down?'

'Yes.'

'Well, that's all right, I'll come and see him.'

Ivan Ivanovitch dressed, took his gnarled stick to keep off the dogs, for there are many more dogs in the streets of Mirgorod than there are men, and went out.

Though Ivan Nikiforovitch's courtyard was next to Ivan Ivanovitch's and one could climb over the fence from one into the other, yet Ivan Ivanovitch went by the street. From the street he had to pass into a by-lane which was so narrow that if two one-horse carts happened to meet in it, they could not pass, but had to remain in that position until they were each dragged by their

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back wheels in the opposite direction into the street; as for anyone on foot, he was as apt to be adorned with burdocks as with flowers. Ivan Ivanovitch's cartshed looked into this lane on the one side, and Ivan Nikiforovitch's barn, gates and dovecot on the other. Ivan Ivanovitch went up to the gate and rattled with the latch. Dogs began barking from within, but soon a crowd of various colours ran up, wagging their tails on seeing that it was a person they knew. Ivan Ivanovitch crossed the courtyard in which Indian pigeons, fed by Ivan Nikiforovitch with his own hand, melon rinds, with here and there green stuff or a broken wheel or hoop off a barrel, or a boy sprawling in a muddy smock—made up a picture such as painters love! The shadow cast by the garments on the clothes-line covered almost the whole courtyard and gave it some degree of coolness. The woman met him with a bow and stood still gaping. Before the house a little porch was adorned with a roof on two oak posts—an unreliable shelter from the sun which at that season in Little Russia shines in deadly earnest and bathes a pedestrian from head to foot in scalding sweat. From this can be seen how strong was Ivan Ivanovitch's desire to obtain the indispensable article, since he had even brought himself to break his invariable rule of walking only in the evening by going out at this hour in such weather!

The room into which Ivan Ivanovitch stepped was quite dark, because the shutters were closed and the sunbeam that penetrated through a hole in the shutter was broken into rainbow hues and painted upon the opposite wall a garish landscape of thatched roofs, trees and clothes hanging in the yard, but all the other way round. This made an uncanny twilight in the whole room.

'God's blessing!' said Ivan Ivanovitch.

'Ah, good day, Ivan Ivanovitch!' answered a voice from the corner of the room. Only then Ivan Ivanovitch observed Ivan Nikiforovitch lying on a rug spread out upon the floor.

'You must excuse my being in a state of nature.' Ivan Nikiforovitch was lying without anything on, even his shirt.

'Never mind. Have you slept well today, Ivan Nikiforovitch?'

'I have. And have you slept, Ivan Ivanovitch?'

'I have.'

'So now you have just got up?'

'Just got up? Good gracious, Ivan Nikiforovitch! How could I sleep till now! I have just come from the farm. The cornfields along the roadside are splendid! Magnificent! And the hay is so high and soft and golden!'

'Gorpina!' shouted Ivan Nikiforovitch, 'bring Ivan Ivanovitch some vodka and some pies with sour cream.'

'It's a very fine day.'

'Don't praise the weather, Ivan Ivanovitch. The devil take it! There's no doing anything for the heat!'

'So you must bring the devil in. Aïe, Ivan Nikiforovitch! you will remember my words, but then it will be too late; you will suffer in the next world for your ungodly language.'

'What have I done to offend you, Ivan Ivanovitch? I've not referred to your father or your mother. I don't know in what way I have offended you!'

'That's enough, that's enough, Ivan Nikiforovitch!'

'Upon my soul I have done nothing to offend you, Ivan Ivanovitch!'

'It's strange that the quails still don't come at the bird-call.'

'You may think what you like, but I have done nothing to offend you.'

'I don't know why it is they don't come,' said Ivan Ivanovitch as though he did not hear Ivan Nikiforovitch, 'whether it is not quite time yet . . . though the weather one would think is just right.'

'You say the cornfields are good . . .'

'Magnificent! Magnificent!'

Then followed a silence.

'How is it you are hanging the clothes out, Ivan Nikiforovitch?' Ivan Ivanovitch said at last.

'Yes, that damned woman has let splendid clothes almost new get mildewy; now I am airing them; it's excellent fine cloth, they only need turning and I can wear them again.'

'I liked one thing there, Ivan Nikiforovitch.'

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‘What’s that?’

‘Tell me, please, what do you want that gun for that’s been hung out to air with the clothes?’ At this point Ivan Ivanovitch held out a snuff-box. ‘May I beg you to help yourself?’

‘Not at all, you help yourself. I’ll take a pinch of my own.’ With this Ivan Nikiforovitch felt about him and got hold of his horn. ‘There’s a silly woman! So she has hung the gun out, too, has she? Capital snuff the Jew makes in Sorotchintsy. I don’t know what he puts in it, but it’s so fragrant! It’s a little like balsam. Here take some, chew a little in your mouth. Isn’t it like balsam? Do take some, help yourself!’

‘Please tell me, Ivan Nikiforovitch, I am still harping on the gun: what are you going to do with it? It’s no use to you, you know.’

‘No use to me, but what if I go shooting?’

‘Lord bless you, Ivan Nikiforovitch, whenever will you go shooting? At the Second Coming perhaps? You have never yet killed a single duck as far as I know and as others tell me, and you have not been created by the Lord for shooting. You have a dignified figure and deportment. How could you go trailing about the bogs when that article of your apparel which it is not quite seemly to mention is in holes on every occasion as it is? What would it be like then? No, what you want is rest and peace.’ (Ivan Ivanovitch as we have mentioned already was extremely picturesque in his speech when he wanted to persuade anyone. How he talked! Goodness, how he talked!) ‘Yes, you must behave accordingly. Listen, give it to me!’

‘What an idea! It’s an expensive gun. You can’t get guns like that nowadays. I bought it from a Turk when I was going into the militia; and to think of giving it away now all of a sudden! Impossible! It’s an indispensable thing!’

‘What is it indispensable for?’

‘What for? Why if burglars should break into the house . . . Not indispensable, indeed! Now, thank God, my mind is at rest and I am afraid of nobody. And why? Because I know I have a gun in my cupboard.’

'A fine gun! Why, Ivan Nikiforovitch, the lock is spoilt.'

'What if it is spoilt? It can be repaired; it only needs a little hemp oil to get the rust off.'

'I see no kind feeling for me in your words, Ivan Nikiforovitch. You won't do anything to show your goodwill.'

'What do you mean, Ivan Ivanovitch, saying I show you no goodwill? Aren't you ashamed? Your oxen graze on my meadow and I have never once interfered with them. When you go to Poltava you always ask me for my trap, and have I ever refused it? Your little boys climb over the fence into my yard and play with my dogs—I say nothing. Let them play, so long as they don't touch anything! Let them play!'

'Since you don't care to give it me, perhaps you might exchange it for something?'

'What will you give me for it?' With this Ivan Nikiforovitch sat up, leaning on his elbow, and looked at Ivan Ivanovitch.

'I'll give you the grey sow, the one that I fed up in the sty. A splendid sow! You'll see if she won't give you a litter of sucking-pigs next year.'

'I don't know how you can suggest that, Ivan Ivanovitch. What use is your sow to me? Am I going to give a wake for the devil?'

'Again! You must keep bringing the devil in! It's a sin, it really is a sin, Ivan Nikiforovitch!'

'How could you really, Ivan Ivanovitch, give me for the gun the devil knows what—a sow?'

'Why is she the devil knows what, Ivan Nikiforovitch?'

'Why is she? I should think you might know that for yourself. This is a gun, a thing everyone knows; while that—the devil only knows what to call it—is a sow! If it had not been you speaking, I might have taken it as an insult.'

'What fault have you found in the sow?'

'What do you take me for? That I should take a pig . . .?'

'Sit still, sit still! I will say no more . . . You may keep your gun, let it rust and rot standing in the corner of the cupboard—I don't want to speak of it again.'

A silence followed upon that.

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'They say', began Ivan Ivanovitch, 'that three kings have declared war on our Tsar.'

'Yes, Pyotr Fyodorovitch told me so. What does it mean? And what's the war about?'

'There is no saying for certain, Ivan Nikiforovitch, what it's about. I imagine that the kings want us all to accept the Turkish faith.'

'My word, the fools, what a thing to want!' Ivan Nikiforovitch commented, raising his head.

'So you see, and our Tsar has declared war on them for that. "No," he says, "you accept the Christian faith!"'

'Well, our fellows will beat them, Ivan Ivanovitch, won't they?'

'They certainly will. So you won't exchange the gun, Ivan Nikiforovitch?'

'I wonder at you, Ivan Ivanovitch: I believe you are a man noted for your culture and education, but you talk like a boy. Why should I be such a fool . . .?'

'Sit still, sit still. God bless the thing! Plague take it; I won't speak of it again.'

At that moment some lunch was brought in. Ivan Ivanovitch drank a glass of vodka and ate a pie with sour cream.

'I say, Ivan Nikiforovitch, I'll give you two sacks of oats besides the sow; you have not sown any oats, you know. You would have to buy oats this year, anyway.'

'Upon my soul, Ivan Ivanovitch, one wants one's belly full of peas to talk to you.' (That was nothing; Ivan Nikiforovitch would let off phrases worse than that.) 'Who has ever heard of swapping a gun for two sacks of oats? I'll be bound you won't offer your *bekesh*.'

'But you forget, Ivan Nikiforovitch, I am giving you the sow, too.'

'What, two sacks of oats and a sow for a gun!'

'Why, isn't it enough?'

'For the gun?'

'Of course for the gun!'

'Two sacks for a gun?'

'Two sacks, not empty, but full of oats; and have you forgotten the sow?'

'You can go and kiss your sow or the devil, if you prefer him!'

'Oh! You'll see, your tongue will be pierced with red-hot needles for such ungodly sayings. One has to wash one's face and hands and fumigate oneself after talking to you.'

'Excuse me, Ivan Ivanovitch: a gun is a gentlemanly thing, a very interesting entertainment, besides being a very agreeable ornament to a room . . .'

'You go on about your gun, Ivan Nikiforovitch, like a fool with a gaudy bag,' said Ivan Ivanovitch with annoyance, for he was really beginning to feel cross.

'And you, Ivan Ivanovitch, are a regular gander.'

If Ivan Nikiforovitch had not uttered that word, they would have quarrelled and have parted friends as they always did; but now something quite different happened. Ivan Ivanovitch turned crimson.

'What was that you said, Ivan Nikiforovitch?' he asked, raising his voice.

'I said you were like a gander, Ivan Ivanovitch!'

'How dare you, sir, forget propriety and respect for a man's rank and family and insult him with such an infamous name?'

'What is there infamous about it? And why are you waving your hands about like that, Ivan Ivanovitch?'

'I repeat, how dare you, regardless of every rule of propriety, call me a gander?'

'Hoity-toity! Ivan Ivanovitch. What are you in such a cackle about?'

Ivan Ivanovitch could no longer control himself; his lips were quivering; his mouth lost its usual resemblance to the letter V and was transformed into an O; his eyes blinked until it was positively alarming. This was extremely rare with Ivan Ivanovitch; he had to be greatly exasperated to be brought to this pass. 'Then I beg to inform you,' Ivan Ivanovitch articulated, 'that I do not want to know you.'

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'No great loss! Upon my word, I shan't weep for that!' answered Ivan Nikiforovitch.

He was lying, upon my soul he was! He was very much upset by it.

'I will never set foot in your house again.'

'A-ha, ah!' said Ivan Nikiforovitch, so vexed that he did not know what he was doing, and, contrary to his habit, he rose to his feet. 'Hey, woman, lad!' At this the same lean old woman and a small boy muffled in a long and full coat appeared in the doorway.

'Take Ivan Ivanovitch by the arms and lead him out of the door!'

'What! A gentleman!' Ivan Ivanovitch cried out indignantly, full of a sense of injured dignity. 'You only dare! You approach! I will annihilate you together with your stupid master! The very crows will not find your place!' (Ivan Ivanovitch used to speak with extraordinary force when his soul was agitated.)

The whole group presented a striking picture: Ivan Nikiforovitch, standing in the middle of the room in full beauty completely unadorned! The serving-woman, with her mouth wide open and an utterly senseless terror-stricken expression on her face! Ivan Ivanovitch, as the Roman tribunes are depicted, with one arm raised! It was an extraordinary moment, a magnificent spectacle! And meanwhile there was but one spectator: that was the boy in an enormous overcoat, who stood very tranquilly picking his nose.

At last Ivan Ivanovitch took his cap.

'Very nice behaviour on your part, Ivan Nikiforovitch! Excellent! I will not let you forget it!'

'Go along, Ivan Ivanovitch, go along! And mind you don't cross my path. If you do, I will smash your ugly face, Ivan Ivanovitch!'

'So much for that, Ivan Nikiforovitch,' answered Ivan Ivanovitch, putting his thumb to his nose and slamming the door, which squeaked huskily and sprang open again.

Ivan Nikiforovitch appeared in the doorway and tried to add something, but Ivan Ivanovitch flew out of the yard without looking back.

III

*What happened after the quarrel of Ivan
Ivanovitch and Ivan Nikiforovitch*

And so two worthy men, the honour and ornament of Mirgorod, had quarrelled! And over what? Over a trifle, over a gander. They refused to see each other, and broke off all relations, though they had hitherto been known as the most inseparable friends! Hitherto Ivan Ivanovitch and Ivan Nikiforovitch had sent every day to enquire after each other's health, and used often to converse together from their respective balconies and would say such agreeable things to each other that it warmed the heart to hear them.

On Sundays, Ivan Ivanovitch in his cloth *bekesh*, and Ivan Nikiforovitch in his yellowish-brown nankeen Cossack tunic, used to set off to church almost arm in arm. And if Ivan Ivanovitch, who had extremely sharp eyes, first noticed a puddle or filth of any sort in the middle of the street—a thing which sometimes does happen in Mirgorod—he would always say to Ivan Nikiforovitch: 'Be careful, don't put your foot down here, for it is unpleasant.' Ivan Nikiforovitch for his part, too, showed the most touching signs of affection, and, however far off he might be standing, always stretched out his hand with his horn of snuff and said: 'Help yourself!' And how capitally they both managed their lands . . . ! And now these two friends . . . I was thunderstruck when I heard of it! For a long time I refused to believe it. Merciful Heavens! Ivan Ivanovitch has quarrelled with Ivan Nikiforovitch! Such estimable men! Is there anything in this world one can depend on after that?

When Ivan Ivanovitch reached home he was for a long time in a state of violent agitation. It was his habit to go first of all to the stable to see whether the mare was eating her oats (Ivan Ivanovitch had a roan mare with a bald patch on her forehead, a very good little beast); then to feed the turkeys and sucking-pigs with his own hand, and only then to go indoors, where he either made wooden bowls (he was very skilful, as good as a turner, at carving things out of wood), or would read a book published by

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Lyubiy, Gariy and Popov (Ivan Ivanovitch did not remember the title of it, because the servant had long ago torn off the upper part of the title-page to amuse a child with it), or would rest in the porch. Now he paid no heed to any of his usual occupations. Instead of doing so, on meeting Gapka he began scolding her for dawdling about doing nothing, though she was dragging grain into the kitchen; he shook his stick at the cock which came to the front steps for its usual tribute; and when a grubby little boy in a tattered shirt ran up to him, shouting 'Daddy, Daddy! give me a cake!' he threatened him and stamped his foot so alarmingly that the terrified boy fled.

At last, however, he recovered himself and began to follow his usual pursuits. He sat down to dinner late, and it was almost evening when he lay down to rest under the porch. The good beet-root soup with pigeons in it which Gapka had cooked completely effaced the incident of the morning. Ivan Ivanovitch began to look after his garden and household with pleasure again. At last his eyes rested on the neighbouring courtyard and he said to himself: 'I haven't been to see Ivan Nikiforovitch today: I'll go round to him.' Saying this, Ivan Ivanovitch took his stick and his cap and was going out into the street; but he had scarcely walked out of the gate when he remembered the quarrel, spat on the ground, and turned back. Almost the same action took place in Ivan Nikiforovitch's yard. Ivan Ivanovitch saw the serving-woman put her foot on the fence with the intention of climbing over into his yard, when suddenly the voice of Ivan Nikiforovitch was audible, shouting: 'Come back, come back! No need!'

Ivan Ivanovitch felt very dreary, however. It might very well have happened that these worthy men would have been reconciled the very next day, had not a particular event in the house of Ivan Nikiforovitch destroyed every hope of reconciliation and poured oil on the fire of resentment when it was on the point of going out.

On the evening of the very same day Agafya Fedosyevna arrived on a visit to Ivan Nikiforovitch. Agafya Fedosyevna was neither a relative nor a sister-in-law, nor, indeed, any connection of

Ivan Nikiforovitch's. One would have thought that she had absolutely no reason to visit him, and he was, indeed, not particularly pleased to see her. She did visit him, however, and used to stay with him for whole weeks at a time and occasionally longer, indeed. Then she carried off the keys and took the whole house-keeping into her own hands. This was very disagreeable to Ivan Nikiforovitch, but, strange to say, he obeyed her like a child, and though he attempted sometimes to quarrel with her, Agafya Fedosyevna always got the best of it.

I must own I do not understand why it has been ordained that women should take us by the nose as easily as they take hold of the handle of the teapot: either their hands are so created or our noses are fit for nothing better. And although Ivan Nikiforovitch's nose was rather like a plum, she took him by that nose and made him follow her about like a little dog. Indeed, he reluctantly changed his whole manner of life when she was there: he did not lie so long in the sun, and, when he did lie there, it was not in a state of nature; he always put on his shirt and his trousers, though Agafya Fedosyevna was far from insisting upon it. She was not one to stand on ceremony, and when Ivan Nikiforovitch had a feverish attack, she used to rub him herself with her own hands from head to foot with vinegar and turpentine. Agafya Fedosyevna wore a cap on her head, three warts on her nose, and a coffee-coloured dressing-jacket with yellow flowers on it. Her whole figure resembled a tub, and so it was as hard to find her waist as to see one's nose without a looking-glass. Her legs were very short and shaped on the pattern of two cushions. She used to talk scandal and eat pickled beetroot in the mornings, and was a wonderful hand at scolding; and through all these varied pursuits, her face never for one moment changed its expression, a strange peculiarity only found as a rule in women.

As soon as she arrived, everything was turned upside down. 'Don't you be reconciled with him, Ivan Nikiforovitch, and don't you beg his pardon; he wants to be your ruin; he is that sort of man! You don't know him!' The damned woman went on whispering and

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whispering, till she brought Ivan Nikiforovitch to such a state that he would not hear Ivan Ivanovitch's name.

Everything assumed a different aspect. If the neighbour's dog ran into the yard, it was whacked with whatever was handy; if the children climbed over the fence, they came back howling with their little grubby shirts held up and marks of a switch on their backs. Even the very serving-woman, when Ivan Ivanovitch would have asked her some question, was so rude that Ivan Ivanovitch, a man of extreme refinement, could only spit and say: **'What a nasty woman! Worse than her master!'**

At last to put the finishing touches to all his offences, the detested neighbour put up directly opposite, at the spot where the fence was usually climbed, a goose-pen, as though with special design to emphasise the insult. This revolting pen was put up with diabolical rapidity in a single day.

This excited fury and a desire for revenge in Ivan Ivanovitch. He did not, however, show any sign of annoyance, although part of the pen was actually on his land; but his heart throbbed so violently that it was extremely hard for him to maintain this outward composure.

So he spent the day. Night came on . . . Oh, if I were a painter how wonderfully I would portray the charm of the night! I would picture all Mirgorod sleeping; the countless stars looking down on it immovably; the quiet streets resounding with the barking of the dogs far and near; the lovesick sacristan hastening by them and climbing over a fence with chivalrous fearlessness; the white walls of the houses still whiter in the moonlight, while the trees that canopy them are darker, the shadows cast by the trees blacker, the flowers and silent grass more fragrant; while from every corner the crickets, the indefatigable minstrels of the night, set up their churring song in unison. I would describe how in one of those low-pitched clay houses a black-browed maiden, tossing on her solitary bed, dreams with her young breast heaving of a hussar's spurs and moustache, while the moonlight smiles on her cheeks. I would describe how the black shadow of a bat that settled on the white chimneys flits across the white road . . . But

even so I could hardly have depicted Ivan Ivanovitch as he went out that night with a saw in his hand, so many were the different emotions written on his countenance! Quietly, stealthily, he slunk up and crept under the goose-pen. Ivan Nikiforovitch's dogs knew nothing as yet of the quarrel between them, and so allowed him as a friend to approach the pen, which stood firmly on four oak posts. Creeping up to the nearest post, he put the saw to it and began sawing. The noise of the saw made him look round every minute, but the thought of the insult revived his courage. The first post was sawn through; Ivan Ivanovitch set to work on the second. His eyes were burning and could see nothing for terror. All at once he uttered a cry and almost fainted; he thought he saw a corpse, but soon he recovered on perceiving that it was the goose, craning its neck at him. Ivan Ivanovitch spat with indignation and went on with his work again. The second post, too, was sawn through; the goose-house tottered. Ivan Ivanovitch's heart began beating so violently as he attacked the third post, that several times he had to stop. More than half of the post was sawn through when all at once the tottering pen gave a violent lurch . . . Ivan Ivanovitch barely had time to leap aside when it came down with a crash. Snatching up the saw in a terrible panic he ran home and flung himself on his bed, without even courage to look out of the window at the results of his terrible act. He fancied that all Ivan Nikiforovitch's household were assembled: the old serving-woman, Ivan Nikiforovitch, the boy in the immense overcoat, were all led by Agafya Fedosyevna, coming with cudgels to break down and smash his house.

Ivan Ivanovitch passed all the following day in a kind of fever. He kept fancying that in revenge his detested neighbour would set fire to his house at least; and so he gave Gapka orders to keep a continual look-out to see whether dry straw had been put down anywhere. At last, to anticipate Ivan Nikiforovitch, he made up his mind to be ahead of him and to lodge a complaint against him in the Mirgorod district court. What this meant the reader may learn from the following chapter.

IV

Of what took place in the Mirgorod district court

A delightful town is Mirgorod! There are all sorts of buildings in it. Some thatched with straw and some with reeds, some even with a wooden roof. A street to the right, a street to the left, everywhere an excellent fence; over it twines the hop, upon it hang pots and pans, behind it the sunflower displays its sun-like head and one catches glimpses of red poppies and fat pumpkins . . . Splendid! The fence is always adorned with objects which make it still more picturesque—a check petticoat stretched out on it or a smock or trousers. There is no thieving nor robbery in Mirgorod, and so everyone hangs on his fence what he thinks fit. If you come from the square, you will certainly stop for a moment to admire the view. There is a pool in it—a wonderful pool! You have never seen one like it! It fills up almost the whole square. A lovely pool! The houses, which might in the distance be taken for haystacks, stand round admiring its beauty.

But to my thinking there is no better house than the district court. Whether it is built of oak or birchwood does not matter to me, but, honoured friends, there are eight windows in it! Eight windows in a row, looking straight on the square and on to that stretch of water of which I have spoken already and which the police-captain calls the lake! It is the only one painted the colour of granite; all the other houses in Mirgorod are simply white-washed. Its roof is all made of wood, and would, indeed, have been painted red, if the oil intended for that purpose had not been eaten by the office clerks with onions, for, as luck would have it, it was Lent, and so the roof was left unpainted. There are steps leading out to the square, and the hens often run up them, because there are almost always grains or other things eatable scattered on the steps; this is not done on purpose, however, but simply from the carelessness of the petitioners coming to the court. The building is divided into two parts: in the one is the court, in the other is the lock-up. In the first part, there are two clean, white-washed rooms; one the outer room for petitioners to wait in, while in the

other there is a table adorned with five inkstands; on the table stands the image of the two-headed eagle, the symbol of office; there are four oak chairs with high backs, and along the walls stand iron-bound chests in which the records of the lawsuits of the district are piled up. On one of these chests a boot polished with blacking was standing at the moment.

The court had been sitting since early morning. The judge, a rather stout man, though considerably thinner than Ivan Niki-forovitch, with a good-natured face and a greasy waistcoat, was talking over a pipe and a cup of tea with the court assessor. The judge's lips were close under his nose, and so his nose could sniff his upper lip to his heart's content. This upper lip served him instead of a snuff-box, for the snuff aimed at his nose almost always settled upon it. And so the judge was talking to the court assessor. At one side a bare-footed wench was holding a trayful of cups. At the end of the table the secretary was reading the summing up of a case, but in such a monotonous and depressing tone that the very man whose case it was would have fallen asleep listening to him. The judge would no doubt have been the first to do so if he had not been engaged in an interesting conversation.

'I purposely tried to find out,' said the judge, taking a sip of tea, though the cup was by now cold, 'how they manage to make them sing so well. I had a capital blackbird two years ago. And do you know, it suddenly went off completely and began singing all anyhow; and the longer it went on, the worse it got; it took to lispings, wheezing—good for nothing! And you know it was the merest trifle! I'll tell you how it's done. A little pimple no bigger than a pea grows under the throat, this must be pricked with a needle. I was told that by Zahar Prokofyevitch, and if you like I'll tell you just how it happened: I was going to see him . . .'

'Am I to read the second, Demyan Demyanovitch?' the secretary, who had finished reading some minutes before, broke in.

'Oh, have you finished it already? Fancy, how quick you have been! I haven't heard a word of it! But where is it? Give it here! I'll sign it! What else have you got there?'

'The case of the Cossack Bokitko's stolen cow.'

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'Very good, read away! Well, so I arrived at his house . . . I can even tell you exactly what he gave me. With the vodka some sturgeon was served, unique! Yes, not like the sturgeon . . .' (At this the judge put out his tongue and smiled, while his nose sniffed his invariable snuff-box) ' . . . to which our Mirgorod shop treats us. I didn't taste the herring because, as you are aware, it gives me heartburn; but I tried the caviare—splendid caviare! there can be no two words about it, superb! Then I drank peach-vodka distilled with centaury. There was saffron-vodka, too; but, as you are aware, I never touch it. It's very nice you know; it whets the appetite before a meal they say, and puts a finishing touch afterwards . . . Ah! what do my ears hear, what do my eyes behold . . .!' the judge cried out all at once on seeing Ivan Ivanovitch walk in.

'God be with you! I wish you good health!' Ivan Ivanovitch pronounced, bowing in all directions with the urbanity which was his peculiar characteristic. My goodness, how he could fascinate us all with his manners! I have never seen such refinement anywhere. He was very well aware of his own consequence, and so looked upon the universal respect in which he was held as his due. The judge himself handed Ivan Ivanovitch a chair, his nose drew in all the snuff from his upper lip, which was always a sign with him of great satisfaction.

'What may I offer you, Ivan Ivanovitch?' he enquired. 'Will you take a cup of tea?'

'No, thank you very much!' answered Ivan Ivanovitch; and he bowed and sat down.

'Oh pray do, just a cup!' repeated the judge.

'No, thank you. Very grateful for your hospitality!' answered Ivan Ivanovitch. He bowed and sat down.

'Just one cup!' repeated the judge.

'Oh, do not trouble, Demyan Demyanovitch!' At this Ivan Ivanovitch bowed and sat down.

'One little cup?'

'Well, perhaps just one cup!' pronounced Ivan Ivanovitch, and he put out his hand to the tray.

Merciful heavens! The height of refinement in that man! There is no describing the pleasing impression made by such manners!

'Mayn't I offer you another cup?'

'No, thank you very much!' answered Ivan Ivanovitch, putting the cup turned upside down upon the tray and bowing.

'To please me, Ivan Ivanovitch!'

'I cannot; I thank you!' With this Ivan Ivanovitch bowed and sat down.

'Ivan Ivanovitch! Come now, as a friend, just one cup!'

'No, very much obliged for your kindness!' Saying this, Ivan Ivanovitch bowed and sat down.

'Just one cup! One cup!'

Ivan Ivanovitch put out his hand to the tray and took a cup.

Well, I am blessed! How that man could keep up his dignity; how ready he was!

'I have', said Ivan Ivanovitch, after drinking the last drop, 'urgent business with you, Demyan Demyanovitch: I wish to lodge a complaint.' With this Ivan Ivanovitch put down his cup and took from his pocket a sheet of stamped paper covered with writing. 'A complaint against my enemy, my sworn foe.'

'Against whom is that?'

'Against Ivan Nikiforovitch Dovgotchun!'

At these words the judge almost fell off his chair. 'What are you saying!' he articulated, flinging up his hands; 'Ivan Ivanovitch! is this you?'

'You see for yourself it is I!'

'The Lord be with you and all the Holy Saints! What! You, Ivan Ivanovitch, have become the enemy of Ivan Nikiforovitch! Was it your lips uttered those words? Say it again! Was not someone hiding behind you and speaking with your voice . . .?'

'What is there so incredible in it? I cannot bear the sight of him: he has done me a deadly injury, he has insulted my honour!'

'Holy Trinity! How shall I ever tell my mother? She, poor old dear, says every day when my sister and I quarrel: "You live like cats and dogs, children. If only you would take example from Ivan Ivanovitch and Ivan Nikiforovitch: once friends, always friends!'

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To be sure they are friends! To be sure they are excellent people!" Fine friends after all! Tell me what's it all about? How is it?"

'It's a delicate matter, Demyan Demyanovitch! It cannot be told by word of mouth: better bid your secretary read my petition. Take it in that way; it would be more proper here.'

'Read it aloud, Taras Tihonovitch!' said the judge, turning to the secretary. Taras Tihonovitch took the petition and, blowing his nose as all secretaries in district courts do blow their noses, that is, with the help of two fingers, began reading:

'From Ivan, son of Ivan, Pererepenko, gentleman and landowner of the Mirgorod district, a petition; whereof the following points ensue:

'(1) Whereas the gentleman Ivan, son of Nikifor, Dovgotchun, notorious to all the world for his godless lawfully-criminal actions which overstep all bounds and provoke aversion, did, on the seventh day of July of the present year 1810, perpetrate a deadly insult upon me, both personally affecting my honour and likewise for the humiliation and confusion of my rank and family. The said gentleman is, moreover, of loathsome appearance, has a quarrelsome temper, and abounds with blasphemous and abusive words of every description . . .'

Here the reader made a slight pause to blow his nose again, while the judge folded his arms with a feeling of reverence and said to himself: 'What a smart pen! Lord have mercy on us! How the man does write!'

Ivan Ivanovitch begged the secretary to read on, and Taras Tihonovitch continued:

'The said gentleman, Ivan, son of Nikifor, Dovgotchun, when I went to him with friendly propositions called me publicly by an insulting name derogatory to my honour, to wit, "gander", though it is well known to all the district of Mirgorod that I have never had the name of that disgusting animal and do not intend to be so named in the future. The proof of my gentle origin is the fact that in the register in the church of the Three Holy Bishops, there is recorded both the

day of my birth and likewise the name given me in baptism. A "gander", as all who have any knowledge whatever of science are aware, cannot be inscribed in the register, seeing that "a gander" is not a man but a bird, a fact thoroughly well known to everyone, even though he may not have been to a seminary. But the aforesaid pernicious gentleman, though fully aware of all this, abused me with the aforesaid foul name for no other purpose than to inflict a deadly insult to my rank and station.

'(2) This same unmannerly and ungentlemanly gentleman has inflicted damage, moreover, upon my private property, inherited by me from my father of the clerical calling, Ivan of blessed memory, son of Onisim Pererepenko, inasmuch as in contravention of every law he has moved a goose-pen precisely opposite my front entrance, which was done with no other design but to emphasise the insult paid me, forasmuch as the said goose-pen had till then been standing in a suitable place and was fairly solid. But the abominable design of the aforesaid gentleman was solely to compel me to witness unseemly incidents: forasmuch as it is well known that no man goes into a pen, above all a goose-pen, for any seemly purpose. In carrying out this illegal action the two foremost posts have trespassed upon my private property, which passed into my possession in the lifetime of my father, Ivan of blessed memory, son of Onisim Pererepenko, which runs in a straight line from the barn to the place where the women wash their pots.

'(3) The gentleman described above, whose very name inspires aversion, cherishes in his heart the wicked design of setting fire to me in my own house. Whereof unmistakable signs are manifest from what follows: in the first place, the said pernicious gentleman has taken to emerging frequently from his apartments, which he never did in the past by reason of his slothfulness and the repulsive corpulence of his person; in the second place, in the servants' quarters adjoining the very fence which is the boundary of my land inherited by me from my late father, Ivan of blessed memory, son of Onisim Pererepenko, there is a light burning every day and for an exceptional length of time, which same is manifest proof thereof; inasmuch as hitherto through his niggardly stinginess not

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only the tallow candle but even the little oil-lamp was always put out.

'And therefore I petition that the said gentleman, Ivan, son of Nikifor, Dovgotchun, as being guilty of arson, of insulting my rank, name and family, and of covetously appropriating my property, and above all for the vulgar and reprehensible coupling with my name the title of "gander", be condemned to the payment of a fine together with all costs and expenses, and himself be thrown into fetters as a law-breaker, and put in the prison of the town, and that this my petition may meet with prompt and immediate attention. Written and composed by Ivan, son of Ivan, Pererepenko, gentleman and land-owner of Mirgorod.'

When the petition had been read, the judge drew nearer to Ivan Ivanovitch, took him by a button and began addressing him in somewhat this fashion: 'What are you about, Ivan Ivanovitch? Have some fear of God! Drop the petition, deuce take it! (Satan be-devil it!) Much better shake hands with Ivan Nikiforovitch and kiss him, and buy some santurin or nikopol wine or simply make some punch and invite me! We'll have a good drink together and forget it all!'

'No, Demyan Demyanovitch, this is not a matter,' said Ivan Ivanovitch with the dignity which always suited him so well, 'this is not a matter which admits of an amicable settlement. Goodbye! Goodbye to you, too, gentlemen!' he continued with the same dignity, turning to the rest of the company. 'I trust that the necessary steps will in due course be taken in accordance with my petition.' And he went out leaving everyone present in amazement.

The judge sat without saying a word; the secretary took a pinch of snuff; the clerks upset the broken bottle which served them for an inkstand, and the judge himself was so absent-minded that he enlarged the pool of ink on the table with his finger.

'What do you say to this, Dorofy Trofimovitch?' said the judge after a brief silence, turning to the assessor.

'I say nothing,' said the assessor.

‘What things people do!’ the judge went on. He had hardly uttered the words when the door creaked and the foremost half of Ivan Nikiforovitch landed in the office—the remainder of him was still in the hall. That Ivan Nikiforovitch should appear, and in the court, too, seemed so extraordinary that the judge cried out, the secretary interrupted his reading, one clerk, in a frieze semblance of a dress-coat, put his pen in his lips, while another swallowed a fly. Even the veteran with a stripe on his shoulder who discharged the duties of messenger and house-porter, and who had hitherto been standing at the door scratching himself under his dirty shirt—even he gaped and trod on somebody’s foot.

‘What fate has brought you? How and why? How are you, Ivan Nikiforovitch?’

But Ivan Nikiforovitch was more dead than alive, for he had stuck in the doorway and could not take a step backwards or forwards. In vain the judge shouted to anyone who might be in the waiting-room to shove Ivan Nikiforovitch from behind into the court. There was nobody in the waiting-room but an old woman who had come with a petition, and in spite of all her efforts she could do nothing with her bony hands. Then one of the clerks, a broad-shouldered fellow with thick lips and a thick nose, with a drunken look in his squinting eyes, and ragged elbows, approached the foremost half of Ivan Nikiforovitch, folded the latter’s arms across his chest as though he were a baby, and winked to the veteran, who shoved with his knee in Ivan Nikiforovitch’s belly, and in spite of the latter’s piteous moans he was squeezed out into the waiting-room. Then they drew back the bolts and opened the second half of the door, during which operation the united efforts and heavy breathing of the clerk and his assistant, the veteran, diffused such a powerful odour about the room that the court seemed transformed for a time into a pot-house.

‘I hope you are not hurt, Ivan Nikiforovitch? I’ll tell my mother and she’ll send you a lotion; you only rub it on your back and it will all pass off.’

But Ivan Nikiforovitch flopped into a chair, and except for prolonged sighs and groans could say nothing. At last in a faint voice

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hardly audible from exhaustion he brought out: 'Would you like some?' and taking his snuff-horn from his pocket added: 'Take some, help yourself!'

'Delighted to see you,' answered the judge, 'but still I cannot imagine what has led you to take so much trouble and to oblige us with such an agreeable surprise.'

'A petition . . .' was all Ivan Nikiforovitch could articulate.

'A petition? What sort of petition?'

'A complaint . . .' (Here breathlessness led to a prolonged pause.) 'Oh! . . . a complaint against that scoundrel . . . Ivan Ivanovitch Pererepenko!'

'Good Lord! You at it too! Such rare friends! A complaint against such an exemplary man . . .!'

'He is the devil himself!' Ivan Nikiforovitch pronounced abruptly.

The judge crossed himself.

'Take my petition, read it!'

'There is no help for it, read it aloud, Taras Tihonovitch,' said the judge, addressing the secretary with an expression of displeasure, though his nose unconsciously sniffed his upper lip, which it commonly did only from great satisfaction. Such perversity on the part of his nose caused the judge even more vexation: he took out his handkerchief and swept from his upper lip all the snuff, to punish its insolence.

The secretary, after going through his usual performance, which he invariably did before beginning to read, that is, blowing his nose without the assistance of a pocket-handkerchief, began in his ordinary voice, as follows:

'The petition of Ivan, son of Nikifor, Doygotchun, gentleman of the Mirgorod district, whereof the following points ensue:

(1) Whereas by his spiteful hatred and undisguised ill will, the self-styled gentleman, Ivan, son of Ivan, Pererepenko, is committing all sorts of mean, injurious, malicious and shocking actions against me, and yesterday, like a robber and a thief, broke—with axes, saws, screwdrivers and all sorts of carpenter's tools—at night

into my yard and into my private pen situate therein, and with his own hand, and infamously hacked it to pieces, whereas on my side I had given no cause whatever for so lawless and burglarious a proceeding.

‘(2) The said gentleman Pererepenko has designs upon my life, and, concealing the said design until the seventh of last month, came to me and began in cunning and friendly fashion begging from me a gun, which stands in my room, and with his characteristic meanness offered me for it many worthless things such as a grey sow and two measures of oats. But, guessing his criminal design at the time, I tried in every way to dissuade him therefrom; but the aforesaid blackguard and scoundrel, Ivan, son of Ivan, Pererepenko, swore at me like a peasant and from that day has cherished an implacable hostility towards me. Moreover, the often aforementioned ferocious gentleman and brigand, Ivan, son of Ivan, Pererepenko, is of a very ignoble origin: his sister was known to all the world as a strumpet, and left the place with the regiment of light cavalry stationed five years ago at Mirgorod and registered her husband as a peasant; his father and mother, too, were exceedingly lawless people, and both were incredible drunkards. But the aforementioned gentleman and robber, Pererepenko, has surpassed all his family in his beastly and reprehensible behaviour, and under a show of piety is guilty of the most profligate conduct: he does not keep the fasts, seeing that on St Philip’s Eve the godless man bought a sheep and next day bade his illegitimate wench Gapka slaughter it, alleging that he had need at once for tallow for lamps and candles.

‘Wherefore I petition that the said gentleman may, as guilty of robbery, sacrilege and cheating, and caught in the act of theft and burglary, be thrown into fetters and cast into the lock-up of the town or prison of the province, and there, as may seem best, after being deprived of his grades and nobility, be soundly flogged and be sent to hard labour in Siberia if need be, and be ordered to pay all costs and expenses, and that this my petition may receive immediate attention. To this petition Ivan, son of Nikifor, Dovgotchun, gentleman of the Mirgorod district, herewith puts his hand.’

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As soon as the secretary had finished reading, Ivan Nikiforovitch picked up his cap and bowed with the intention of going away.

'Where are you off to, Ivan Nikiforovitch?' the judge called after him. 'Do stay a little! Have some tea! Oryshko! Why are you standing there, silly girl, winking at the clerks? Go and bring some tea!'

But Ivan Nikiforovitch, terrified at having come so far from home and having endured so dangerous a quarantine, was already through the doorway saying: 'Don't put yourself out, with pleasure I'll . . .' and he shut the door after him, leaving all the court in amazement.

There was no help for it. Both petitions had been received and the case seemed likely to awaken considerable interest, when an unforeseen circumstance gave it an even more remarkable character. When the judge had gone out of the court, accompanied by the assessor and the secretary, and the clerks were stowing away into a sack the various fowls, eggs, pies, rolls and other trifles brought by the petitioners, the grey sow ran into the room and, to the surprise of all present, seized—not a pie or a crust of bread, but Ivan Nikiforovitch's petition, which was lying at the end of the table with its pages hanging over the edge. Snatching up the petition, the grey grunter ran out so quickly that not one of the clerks could overtake her, in spite of the rulers and inkpots that were thrown after her.

This extraordinary incident caused a terrible commotion, because they had not taken a copy of the petition. The judge, his secretary, and the assessor spent a long time arguing over this unprecedented event; at last it was decided to write a report on it to the police-captain, since proceedings in this matter were more the concern of the city police. The report, No. 389, was sent to him the same day and led to rather an interesting explanation, of which the reader may learn from the next chapter.

V

*In which is described a consultation between two
Personages highly respected in Mirgorod*

Ivan Ivanovitch had only just seen after his household duties and gone out, as his habit was, to lie down in the porch, when to his unutterable surprise he saw something red at the garden gate. It was the police-captain's red cuff which, like his collar, had acquired a glaze, and at the edges was being transformed into polished leather. Ivan Ivanovitch thought to himself: 'It's just as well that Pyotr Fyodorovitch has come for a little talk'; but he was much surprised to see the police-captain walking extremely fast and waving his hands, which he did not do as a rule. There were eight buttons on the police-captain's uniform; the ninth had been torn off during the procession at the consecration of the church two years before, and the police-constables had not yet been able to find it; though when the superintendents presented the police-captain with their daily reports he invariably enquired whether the button had been found. These eight buttons had been sewn on as peasant-women sow beans, one to the right and the next to the left. His left leg had been struck by a bullet in his last campaign, and so, as he limped along, he flung it so far to one side that it almost cancelled all the work done by the right leg. The more rapidly the police-captain forced the march the less he advanced, and so, while he was approaching the porch, Ivan Ivanovitch had time enough to lose himself in conjecture why the police-captain was waving his arms so vigorously. This interested him the more as he thought the latter's business must be of exceptional importance, since he was actually wearing his new sword.

'Good day, Pyotr Fyodorovitch!' cried Ivan Ivanovitch, who, as we have said already, was very inquisitive and could not restrain his impatience at the sight of the police-captain attacking the step, still not raising his eyes, but struggling with his unruly members which were utterly unable to take the step at one assault.

'A very good day to my dear friend and benefactor, Ivan Ivanovitch!' answered the police-captain.

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'Pray be seated. You are tired I see, for your wounded leg hinders . . .'

'My leg!' cried the police-captain, casting upon Ivan Ivanovitch a glance such as a giant casts on a pigmy or a learned pedant on a dancing-master. With this he stretched out his foot and stamped on the floor with it. This display of valour, however, cost him dear, for his whole person lurched forward and his nose pecked the railing; but the sage guardian of order, to preserve appearances, at once righted himself and felt in his pocket as though to get out his snuff-box.

'I can assure you, my dearest friend and benefactor, Ivan Ivanovitch, that I have made worse marches in my time. Yes, seriously I have. For instance during the campaign of 1807 . . . Ah, I'll tell you how I climbed over a fence to visit a pretty German.' With this the police-captain screwed up one eye and gave a fiendishly sly smile.

'Where have you been today?' asked Ivan Ivanovitch, desirous of cutting the police-captain short and bringing him as quickly as possible to the occasion of his visit. He would very much have liked to ask what it was the police-captain intended to tell him; but a refined *savoir faire* made him feel the impropriety of such a question, and Ivan Ivanovitch was obliged to control himself and to wait for the solution of the mystery, though his heart was throbbing with unusual violence.

'By all means, I will tell you where I have been,' answered the police-captain. 'In the first place I must tell you that it is beautiful weather today . . .'

The last words were almost too much for Ivan Ivanovitch.

'But excuse me,' the police-captain went on, 'I've come to you today about an important matter.' Here the police-captain's face and deportment resumed the anxious expression with which he had attacked the steps. Ivan Ivanovitch revived, and trembled as though he were in a fever, though as his habit was, he promptly asked:

'What is it? Important? Is it really important?'

'Well, you will see: first of all, I must hasten to inform you,

dear friend and benefactor, Ivan Ivanovitch, that you . . . for my part kindly observe I say nothing, but the forms of government, the forms of government demand it: you have committed a breach of public order!

'What are you saying, Pyotr Fyodorovitch? I don't understand a word of it.'

'Upon my soul, Ivan Ivanovitch! How can you say you don't understand a word of it? Your own beast has carried off a very important legal document, and after that you say you don't understand a word of it!'

'What beast?'

'Saving your presence, your own grey sow.'

'And how am I to blame? Why did the court porter open the door?'

'But, Ivan Ivanovitch, the beast is your property; so you are to blame.'

'I am very much obliged to you for putting me on a level with a sow.'

'Come, I did not say that, Ivan Ivanovitch! Dear me, I did not say that! Kindly consider the question yourself with an open mind. You are undoubtedly aware that, in accordance with the forms of government, unclean animals are prohibited from walking about in the town, especially in the principal streets. You must admit that that's prohibited.'

'God knows what you are talking about. As though it mattered a sow going out into the street!'

'Allow me to put to you, allow me, allow me, Ivan Ivanovitch; it's utterly impossible. What can we do? It's the will of the government, we must obey. I do not dispute the fact that fowls and geese sometimes run into the street and even into the square—fowls and geese, mind; but even last year I issued a proclamation that pigs and goats were not to be allowed in public squares, and I ordered that proclamation to be read aloud before the assembled people.'

'Well, Pyotr Fyodorovitch, I see nothing in all this but that you are trying to insult me in every way possible.'

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'Oh, you can't say that, my dear friend and benefactor, you can't say that I am trying to insult you! Think yourself: I didn't say a word to you last year when you put up a roof of fully a yard higher than the legal height. On the contrary, I pretended I hadn't noticed it at all. Believe me, dearest friend, on this occasion, too, I would absolutely, so to speak . . . but my duty, my office, in fact, requires me to look after public cleanliness. Only consider when all at once there rushes into the principal street . . .'

'Your principal street, indeed! Why, every peasant-woman goes there to fling away what she does not want.'

'Allow me to say, Ivan Ivanovitch, that it's you who are insulting me! It is true it does happen at times, but mostly under a fence, or behind barns or sheds; but that a sow in farrow should run into the principal street, the square, is a thing that . . .'

'Good gracious, Pyotr Fyodorovitch! Why, a sow is God's creation!'

'Agreed. All the world knows that you are a learned man, that you are versed in the sciences and all manner of subjects. Of course, I have never studied any sciences at all. I began to learn to write only when I was thirty. You see I rose from the ranks, as you are aware.'

'H'm!' said Ivan Ivanovitch.

'Yes,' the police-captain went on, 'in 1801 I was in the 42nd regiment of light cavalry, an ensign in the 4th company. Our company commander was—if you will allow me to say so—Captain Yeremyeyev.' At this the police-captain put his finger into the snuff-box which Ivan Ivanovitch held open and fiddled with the snuff.

Ivan Ivanovitch answered: 'H'm.'

'But my duty', the police-captain went on, 'is to obey the commands of government. Are you aware, Ivan Ivanovitch, that anyone who purloins a legal document in a court of law is liable like any other criminal to be tried in a criminal court?'

'I am so well aware of it that if you like I will teach you. That applies to human beings; for instance, if you were to steal a document; but a sow is an animal, God's creation.'

'Quite so, but the law says one guilty of purloining . . . I beg you to note attentively, *one guilty!* Nothing is here defined as to species, sex or calling; therefore an animal, too, may be guilty. Say what you like, but until sentence is passed on it, the animal ought to be handed over to the police, as guilty of a breach of order.'

'No, Pyotr Fyodorovitch,' retorted Ivan Ivanovitch coolly, 'that will not be so!'

'As you like, but I am bound to follow the regulations of government.'

'Why are you threatening me? I suppose you mean to send the one-armed soldier for her? I'll bid my servant-girl show him out with the oven-fork; his remaining arm will be broken.'

'I will not venture to argue with you. In that case, if you will not hand her over to the police, make what use you like of her; cut her up, if you like, for Christmas, and make her into ham or eat her as fresh pork. Only I should like to ask you, if you will be making sausages, to send me just a couple of those your Gapka makes so nicely of the blood and fat. My Agrafena Trofimovna is very fond of them.'

'Certainly I'll send you a couple of sausages.'

'I shall be very grateful to you, dear friend and benefactor. Now allow me to say just one more word. I am charged by the judge and, indeed, by all our acquaintances, so to speak, to reconcile you with your friend, Ivan Nikiforovitch.'

'What! That boor! Reconcile me with that ruffian! Never! That will never be! Never!' Ivan Ivanovitch was in an extremely resolute mood.

'Have it your own way,' answered the police-captain, regaling both nostrils with snuff. 'I will not venture to advise you; however, allow me to put it to you; here you are now on bad terms, while if you are reconciled . . .'

But Ivan Ivanovitch began talking about catching quails, which was his usual resource when he wanted to change the subject.

And so the police-captain was obliged to go about his business without having achieved any success whatever.

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VI

*From which the Reader may easily learn
all that is contained therein*

In spite of all the efforts of the court to conceal the affair, the very next day all Mirgorod knew that Ivan Ivanovitch's sow had carried off Ivan Nikiforovitch's petition. The police-captain himself, in a moment of forgetfulness, first let slip a word. When Ivan Nikiforovitch was told of it, he made no comment; he only asked: 'Wasn't it the grey one?'

But Agafiya Fedosyevna, who was present at the time, began setting upon Ivan Nikiforovitch again: 'What are you thinking about, Ivan Nikiforovitch? You'll be laughed at as a fool if you let it pass! A fine gentleman you'll be after this! You'll be lower than the peasant-woman who sells the doughnuts you are so fond of.'

And the pertinacious woman talked him round! She picked up a swarthy middle-aged man with pimples all over his face, in a dark blue coat with patches on the elbows, a typical scribbling pettifogger! He smeared his high-boots with tar, wore three pens in his ear and a glass bottle by way of an inkpot tied on a string to a button. He would eat nine pies at a sitting and put the tenth in his pocket, and would write so much of all manner of legal chicanery on a single sheet of stamped paper that nobody could read it aloud straight off without intervals of coughing and sneezing. This little image of a man rummaged about, racked his brains and wrote, and at last concocted the following document:

To the Mirgorod district court from the gentleman, Ivan, son of Nikifor, Dovgotchun.

Concerning the aforesaid my petition the which was from me, the gentleman Ivan, son of Nikifor, Dovgotchun, relating to the gentleman Ivan, son of Ivan, Pererepenko, wherein which the district court of Mirgorod has manifested its partiality. And the same wanton insolence of the grey sow which was kept a secret and has reached our ears from persons in no way concerned therewith. Whereto the partiality and connivance, as of evil intention, falls within the

jurisdiction of the law; inasmuch as the aforesaid sow is a foolish creature and thereby the more apt for the purloining of papers. Wherefrom it is evidently apparent that the sow frequently aforementioned, could not otherwise than have been incited to the same by the opposing party, the self-styled gentleman, Ivan, son of Ivan, Pererepenko, the same having been already detected in housebreaking, attempted murder and sacrilege. But the aforesaid Mirgorod court with its characteristic partiality manifested its tacit connivance; without the which connivance the aforesaid sow could by no manner of means have been admitted to the purloining of the paper, inasmuch as the Mirgorod district court is well provided with service; to which intent it is sufficient to name one soldier present on all occasions in the reception-room, who, though he has a cross-eye and a somewhat invalidated arm, is yet fully capable of driving out a sow and striking her with a stick. Wherefrom the connivance of the aforesaid Mirgorod court thereto is proven and the partition of the ill-gotten profits therefrom on mutual terms is abundantly evident. The aforesaid robber and gentleman, Ivan, son of Ivan, Pererepenko, is manifestly the scoundrelly accomplice therein. Wherefore I, the gentleman Ivan, son of Nikifor, Dovgotchun, do herewith inform the said district court that if the petition above-mentioned shall not be recovered from the aforesaid grey sow, or from the gentleman Pererepenko, her accomplice, and if proceedings shall not be taken upon it in accordance with justice and in my favour, then I, the gentleman, Ivan, son of Nikifor, Dovgotchun, will lodge a complaint with the higher court concerning such illegal connivance of the aforesaid district court, transferring the case thereto with all due formalities.

Ivan, son of Nikifor, Dovgotchun, gentleman of the Mirgorod district.

This petition produced its effect. The judge, like good-natured people as a rule, was a man of cowardly disposition. He appealed to the secretary. But the secretary emitted a bass 'H'm' through his lips, while his countenance wore the expression of unconcern and diabolical ambiguity which appears only on the face of Satan when he sees the victim who has appealed to him lying at his feet.

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One resource only was left: to reconcile the two friends. But how approach that when all attempts had hitherto been unsuccessful? However, they decided to try again; but Ivan Ivanovitch declared point-blank that he would not hear of it, and was, indeed, very much incensed. Ivan Nikiforovitch turned his back instead of answering, and did not utter a word. Then the case went forward with the extraordinary rapidity for which our courts of justice are so famous. A document was registered, inscribed, docketed, filed, copied, all in one and the same day; and then the case was laid on a shelf, where it lay and lay and lay for one year and a second and a third. Numbers of young girls had time to get married; a new street was laid down in Mirgorod, the judge lost one molar tooth and two side ones; more small children were running about Ivan Ivanovitch's yard than before (goodness only knows where they sprang from); to spite Ivan Ivanovitch, Ivan Nikiforovitch built a new goose-pen, though a little further away than the first, and so completely screened himself from Ivan Ivanovitch that these worthy gentlemen scarcely ever saw each other's faces—and still the case lay in perfect order, in the cupboard which had been turned to marble by ink-stains.

Meanwhile there occurred an event of the greatest importance in Mirgorod. The police-captain was giving a ball! Where can I find brushes and colours to paint the variety of the assembly and the magnificence of the entertainment? Take a clock, open it, and look what is going on there! A terrible to-do, isn't it? Now imagine as many if not more wheels standing in the police-captain's courtyard. What chaises and travelling carriages were not there! One had a wide back and a narrow front; another a narrow back but a wide front. One was a chaise and a covered trap both at once; another was neither chaise nor trap; one was like a huge haystack or a fat merchant's wife; another was like a dishevelled Jew or a skeleton that had not quite got rid of its skin. One was in profile exactly like a pipe with a long mouthpiece; another a strange creation, utterly shapeless and fantastic, was unlike anything in the world. From the midst of this chaos of wheels and box-seats rose the semblance of a carriage with a window like that of a room,

with a thick bar right across it. The coachmen in grey Cossack coats, tunics and grey jerkins, in sheepskin hats and caps of all patterns, with pipes in their hands, led the unharnessed horses about the courtyards. What a ball it was that the police-captain gave! Allow me, I will count over all who were there. Taras Tarasovitch, Yevil Akinfovitch, Yevtihiy Yevtihiyevitch, Ivan Ivanovitch—not *the* Ivan Ivanovitch, but the other—Savva Gavrilovitch, our Ivan Ivanovitch, Yelevfery Yelevferievitch, Makar Nazaryevitch, Foma Grigoryevitch . . . I cannot go on! It is too much for me! My hand is tired with writing! And how many ladies there were! Dark and fair, and long and short, stout as Ivan Nikiforovitch, and so thin that it seemed as though one could hide each one of them in the scabbard of the police-captain's sword. What caps! What dresses! Red, yellow, coffee-coloured, green, blue, new, turned and re-made—fichus, ribbons, reticules! Good-bye to my poor eyes! They will be no more use after that spectacle. And what a long table was drawn out! And how everybody talked; what an uproar there was! A mill with all its clappers, grindstones and wheels going is nothing to it! I cannot tell you for certain what they talked about, but it must be supposed that they discussed many interesting and important topics, such as the weather, dogs, ladies' caps, wheat, horses. At last Ivan Ivanovitch—not *the* Ivan Ivanovitch but the other one who squinted—said: 'I am very much surprised that my right eye' (the squinting Ivan Ivanovitch always spoke ironically of himself) 'does not see Ivan Nikiforovitch.'

'He would not come!' said the police-captain.

'How is that?'

'Well, it's two years, thank God, since they had a quarrel, that is Ivan Ivanovitch and Ivan Nikiforovitch, and wherever one goes the other won't come on any account!'

'What are you telling me!' At this the squinting Ivan Ivanovitch turned his eyes upwards and clasped his hands together.

'Well now, if men with good eyes don't live in peace, how am I to see eye to eye with anyone!'

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At these words everyone laughed heartily. We were all very fond of the squinting Ivan Ivanovitch, because he used to make jokes that were precisely in the taste of the day. Even a tall lean man in a wadded overcoat with a plaster on his nose who had hitherto been sitting in the corner without the slightest change in the expression of his face, even when a fly flew up his nose—even this gentleman rose from his seat and moved nearer to the crowd surrounding the squinting Ivan Ivanovitch.

‘Do you know what,’ the latter said when he saw a goodly company standing round him, ‘instead of gazing at my cross-eye, as you are now, let us reconcile our two friends! At this moment Ivan Ivanovitch is conversing with the ladies—let us send on the sly for Ivan Nikiforovitch and bring them together.’

All unanimously fell in with Ivan Ivanovitch’s suggestion and decided to send at once to Ivan Nikiforovitch’s house to beg him most particularly to come to dine with the police-captain. But the important question to whom to entrust this weighty commission puzzled everyone. They discussed at length who was most capable and most skilful in the diplomatic line; at last, it was unanimously resolved to confide the task to Anton Prokofyevitch Golopuz.

But we must first make the reader a little acquainted with this remarkable person. Anton Prokofyevitch was a perfectly virtuous man in the full meaning of that word; if any of the worthy citizens of Mirgorod gave him a neck-handkerchief or a pair of breeches, he thanked them; if any gave him a slight flip on the nose, he thanked them even then. If he were asked: ‘Why is it your frock-coat is brown, Anton Prokofyevitch, but the sleeves are blue?’ he almost always answered: ‘And you haven’t one at all! Wait a bit, it will soon be shabby and then it will be all alike!’ And in fact the blue cloth began, from the effect of the sun, to turn brown, and now it goes perfectly well with the colour of the coat. But what is strange is that Anton Prokofyevitch has the habit of wearing cloth clothes in the summer and cotton in the winter. He has no house of his own. He used to have one at the end of the town, but he sold it and with the money he got for it he bought

three bay horses and a small chaise, in which he used to ride about visiting the neighbouring landowners. But as the horses gave him a great deal of trouble, and besides he needed money to buy them oats, Anton Prokofyevitch swapped them for a fiddle and a serf-girl, receiving a twenty-five-rouble note into the bargain. Then Anton Prokofyevitch sold the fiddle and swapped the girl for a Morocco purse set with gold, and now he has a purse the like of which no one else possesses. He pays for this gratification by not being able to drive about the countryside, and is forced to remain in town and to spend his nights at different houses, especially those of the gentlemen who derive pleasure from flipping him on the nose. Anton Prokofyevitch is fond of good fare and plays pretty well at 'Fools' and 'Millers'. Obedience has always been his natural element, and so, taking his cap and his stick, he set off immediately.

But as he went, he began thinking how he was to move Ivan Nikiforovitch to come to the reception. The somewhat harsh character of that otherwise estimable individual made his task almost an impossible one. And, indeed, how could he be induced to come when even to get out of bed was a very great effort for him? And even supposing that he did get up, was he likely to go where—as he undoubtedly knew—his irreconcilable enemy was to be found? The more Anton Prokofyevitch considered the subject, the more difficulties he found. The day was sultry; the sun was scorching; the perspiration poured down him in streams. Anton Prokofyevitch, though he was flipped on the nose, was rather a wily man in many ways. It was only in barter that he was rather unlucky. He knew very well when he had to pretend to be a fool, and sometimes knew how to hold his own in circumstances and cases in which a clever man can not often steer his course.

While his resourceful mind was thinking out means for persuading Ivan Nikiforovitch, and he was going valiantly to face the worst, an unexpected circumstance somewhat disconcerted him. It will not be amiss at this juncture to inform the reader that Anton Prokofyevitch had, among other things, a pair of trousers with the strange peculiarity of attracting all the dogs to bite his

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calves whenever he put them on. As ill-luck would have it, he had put on those trousers that day, and so he had hardly abandoned himself to meditation when a terrible barking in all directions smote on his hearing. Anton Prokofyevitch set up such a shout (no one could shout louder than he) that not only our friend the serving-woman and the inmate of the immense overcoat ran out to meet him, but even the urchins from Ivan Ivanovitch's courtyard raced to him, and, though the dogs only succeeded in biting one leg, this greatly cooled his ardour, and he went up the steps with a certain timidity.

VII

And last

'Ah, good day! What have you been teasing my dogs for?' said Ivan Nikiforovitch, on seeing Anton Prokofyevitch; for no one ever addressed the latter except jocosely.

'Plague take them all! Who's teasing them?' answered Anton Prokofyevitch.

'That's a lie.'

'Upon my soul, it isn't! Pyotr Fyodorovitch asks you to dinner.'

'H'm!'

'Upon my soul! I can't tell you how earnestly he begs you to come. "What's the meaning of it," he said, "Ivan Nikiforovitch avoids me as though I were an enemy; he will never come for a little chat or to sit a bit."'

Ivan Nikiforovitch stroked his chin.

'“If Ivan Nikiforovitch will not come now,” he said, “I don't know what to think: he must have something in his mind against me! Do me the favour, Anton Prokofyevitch, persuade Ivan Nikiforovitch!” Come, Ivan Nikiforovitch, let us go! There is a delightful company there now!'

Ivan Nikiforovitch began scrutinising a cock, who was standing on the steps crowing his loudest.

'If only you knew, Ivan Nikiforovitch,' the zealous delegate

continued, 'what oysters, what fresh caviare has been sent to Pyotr Fyodorovitch!'

At this Ivan Nikiforovitch turned his head and began listening attentively.

This encouraged the delegate.

'Let us make haste and go; Foma Grigoryevitch is there, too! What are you doing?' he added, seeing that Ivan Nikiforovitch was still lying in the same position. 'Well, are we going or not?'

'I don't want to.'

That 'I don't want to' was a shock to Anton Prokofyevitch; he had already imagined that his urgent representations had completely prevailed on this really worthy man; but he heard instead a resolute 'I don't want to.'

'Why don't you want to?' he asked almost with annoyance, a feeling he very rarely displayed, even when he had burning paper put on his head, which was a trick the judge and the police-captain were particularly fond of.

Ivan Nikiforovitch took a pinch of snuff.

'It's your business, Ivan Nikiforovitch, but I don't know what prevents you.'

'Why should I go?' Ivan Nikiforovitch brought out at last. 'The ruffian will be there!' That was what he usually called Ivan Ivanovitch now . . . Merciful heavens! And not long ago . . .

'Upon my soul, he won't! By all that's holy he won't! May I be struck dead on the spot with a thunderbolt!' answered Anton Prokofyevitch, who was ready to take his oath a dozen times in an hour. 'Let us go, Ivan Nikiforovitch!'

'But you are lying, Anton Prokofyevitch, he is there, isn't he?'

'Indeed and he's not! May I never leave the spot if he is! And think yourself what reason have I to tell a lie! May my arms and legs be withered! . . . What, don't you believe me even now? May I drop here dead at your feet! May neither father nor mother nor myself ever see the kingdom of heaven! Do you still disbelieve me?'

Ivan Nikiforovitch was completely appeased by these assurances, and bade his valet in the enormous overcoat to bring him his trousers and his nankeen Cossack coat.

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I imagine that it is quite superfluous to describe how Ivan Nikiforovitch put on his trousers, how his cravat was tied, and how, finally, he put on his Cossack coat which had split under the left sleeve. It is enough to say that during that time he maintained a decorous composure and did not answer one word to Anton Prokofyevitch's proposition that he should swop something with him for his Turkish purse.

Meanwhile the assembled company were, with impatience, awaiting the decisive moment when Ivan Nikiforovitch would make his appearance, and the universal desire that these worthy men should be reconciled might at last be gratified. Many were almost positive that Ivan Nikiforovitch would not come. The police-captain even offered to take a wager with squinting Ivan Ivanovitch that he would not come, and only gave it up because the latter insisted that the police-captain should stake his wounded leg and he his cross-eye—at which the police-captain was mightily offended and the company laughed on the sly. No one had yet sat down to table, though it was long past one o'clock—an hour at which people have got some way with their dinner at Mirgorod, even on grand occasions.

Anton Prokofyevitch had hardly appeared at the door when he was instantly surrounded by all. In answer to all questions he shouted one decisive phrase: 'Won't come!' . . . He had scarcely uttered this, and a shower of reproaches and abuse and possibly flips, too, was about to descend on his head for the failure of his mission, when the door opened suddenly and—Ivan Nikiforovitch walked in.

If Satan himself or a corpse had suddenly appeared they would not have produced such amazement as that into which Ivan Nikiforovitch's entrance plunged the whole company; while Anton Prokofyevitch went off into guffaws of laughter, holding his sides with glee that he had so taken them in.

Anyway, it was almost incredible to everyone that Ivan Nikiforovitch could, in so short a time, have dressed as befits a gentleman. Ivan Ivanovitch was not present at this moment; he had left the room. Recovering from their stupefaction, all the company

showed their interest in Ivan Nikiforovitch's health and expressed their pleasure that he had grown stouter. Ivan Nikiforovitch kissed everyone and said: 'Much obliged.'

Meanwhile the smell of beetroot soup floated through the room and agreeably tickled the nostrils of the fasting guests. All streamed into the dining-room. A string of ladies, talkative and silent, lean and stout, filed in ahead, and the long table was dotted with every hue. I am not going to describe all the dishes on the table! I shall say nothing of the cheese-cakes and sour cream, nor of the sweet-bread served in the beetroot soup, nor of the turkey stuffed with plums and raisins, nor of the dish that looked very much like a boot soaked in kvass, nor of the sauce which is the swan-song of the old cook, the sauce which is served in flaming spirit to the great diversion, and, at the same time, terror of the ladies. I am not going to talk about these dishes because I greatly prefer eating them to expatiating on them in conversation.

Ivan Ivanovitch was very much pleased with the fish prepared with horseradish sauce. He was entirely engrossed in the useful and nutritious exercise of eating it. Picking out the smallest fish-bones, he laid them on the plate, and somehow chanced to glance across the table. Heavenly Creator! How strange it was! Opposite him was sitting Ivan Nikiforovitch!

At the very same instant Ivan Nikiforovitch looked up, too . . . ! No . . . ! I cannot! Give me another pen! My pen is feeble, dead; it has too thin a nib for this picture! Their faces were as though turned to stone with amazement reflected on them. Each saw the long-familiar face, at the sight of which, one might suppose, each would advance as to an unexpected friend, offering his snuff-box with the words: 'Help yourself,' or, 'I venture to ask you to help yourself'; and yet that very face was terrible as some evil portent! Drops of sweat rolled down the faces of Ivan Ivanovitch and of Ivan Nikiforovitch.

All who were sitting at the table were mute with attention and could not take their eyes off the friends of days gone by. The ladies, who had till then been absorbed in a rather interesting conversation on the method of preparing capons, suddenly ceased

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talking. All was hushed! It was a picture worthy of the brush of a great artist.

At last Ivan Ivanovitch took out his handkerchief and began to blow his nose, while Ivan Nikiforovitch looked round and rested his eyes on the open door.

The police-captain at once noticed this movement and bade the servant shut the door securely. Then each of the friends began eating, and they did not once glance at each other again.

As soon as dinner was over, the two old friends rose from their seats and began looking for their caps to slip away. Then the police-captain gave a wink, and Ivan Ivanovitch—not *the* Ivan Ivanovitch but the other, the one who squinted—stood behind Ivan Nikiforovitch's back while the police-captain went up behind Ivan Ivanovitch's back, and both began shoving them from behind so as to push them towards each other and not to let them go till they had shaken hands. Ivan Ivanovitch, the one who squinted, though he shoved Ivan Nikiforovitch a little askew, yet pushed him fairly successfully to the place where Ivan Ivanovitch was standing; but the police-captain took a line too much to one side, because again he could not cope with his unruly member which, on this occasion, would heed no command, and, as though to spite him, lurched a long way off in quite the opposite direction (this may possibly have been due to the number of liqueurs on the table), so that Ivan Ivanovitch fell against a lady in a red dress who had been compelled by curiosity to thrust herself into their midst. Such an incident boded nothing good. However, to mend matters, the judge took the police-captain's place and, sniffing up all the snuff from his upper lip, shoved Ivan Ivanovitch in the other direction. This is the usual means of bringing about a reconciliation in Mirgorod; it is not unlike a game of ball. As soon as the judge gave Ivan Ivanovitch a shove, the Ivan Ivanovitch who squinted pushed with all his strength and shoved Ivan Nikiforovitch, from whom the sweat was dropping like rainwater from a roof. Although both friends resisted stoutly, they were yet thrust together, because both sides received considerable support from the other guests.

Then they were closely surrounded on all sides and not allowed to go until they consented to shake hands.

‘God bless you, Ivan Nikiforovitch and Ivan Ivanovitch! Tell us truthfully now: what did you quarrel about? Wasn’t it something trifling? Aren’t you ashamed before men and before God!’

‘I don’t know,’ said Ivan Nikiforovitch, panting with exhaustion (it was noticeable that he was by no means averse to reconciliation). ‘I don’t know what I have done to Ivan Ivanovitch; why did he cut down my goose-pen and plot my ruin?’

‘I am not guilty of any such evil design,’ said Ivan Ivanovitch, not looking at Ivan Nikiforovitch. ‘I swear before God and before you, honourable gentlemen, I have done nothing to my enemy. Why does he defame me and cast ignominy on my rank and name?’

‘How have I cast ignominy on you, Ivan Ivanovitch?’ said Ivan Nikiforovitch. Another moment of explanation—another moment of reconciliation—and the long-standing feud was on the point of dying out. Already Ivan Nikiforovitch was feeling in his pocket to get out his snuff-horn and say: ‘Help yourself.’

‘Was it not damage,’ answered Ivan Ivanovitch without raising his eyes, ‘when you, sir, insulted my rank and name with a word which it would be unseemly to repeat here?’

‘Let me tell you as a friend, Ivan Ivanovitch!’ (At this Ivan Nikiforovitch put his finger on Ivan Ivanovitch’s button, which was a sign of his complete goodwill.) ‘You took offence over the devil knows what, over my calling you a “gander” . . .’

Ivan Nikiforovitch was instantly aware that he had committed an indiscretion in uttering that word; but it was too late: the word had been uttered. All was ruined! Since Ivan Ivanovitch had been beside himself and had flown into a rage, such as God grant one may never see, at the utterance of that word in private—think, dear readers, what it was now when this murderous word had been uttered in a company among whom there were a number of ladies, in whose society Ivan Ivanovitch liked to be particularly punctilious. Had Ivan Nikiforovitch acted otherwise, had he said ‘bird’, and not ‘gander’, the position might still have been saved. But—all was over!

The Tale of Ivan Ivanovitch

He cast on Ivan Nikiforovitch a glance—and what a glance! If that glance had been endowed with the power of action it would have reduced Ivan Nikiforovitch to ashes. The guests understood that glance, and of their own accord made haste to separate them. And that man, a paragon of gentleness, who never let one beggar-woman pass without questioning her, rushed out in a terrible fury. How violent are the tempests aroused by the passions!

For a whole month nothing was heard of Ivan Ivanovitch. He shut himself up in his house. The sacred chest was opened, from the chest were taken—what? Silver roubles! Old ancestral silver roubles! And these silver roubles passed into the inky hands of scribblers. The case was transferred to the higher court. And when Ivan Ivanovitch received the joyous tidings that it would be decided on the morrow, only then he looked out at the world and made up his mind to go out. Alas! for the next ten years the higher court informed him daily that the case would be settled on the morrow!

Five years ago I was passing through the town of Mirgorod. It was a bad time for travelling. Autumn had set in with its gloomy, damp weather, mud and fog. A sort of unnatural greenness—the work of the tedious, incessant rains—lay in a thin network over the meadows and cornfields, on which it seemed no more becoming than mischievous tricks in an old man, or roses on an old woman. In those days weather had a great effect upon me: I was depressed when it was dreary. But in spite of that I felt my heart beating eagerly as I drove into Mirgorod. Goodness, how many memories! It was twelve years since I had seen Mirgorod. Here, in those days, lived in touching friendship two unique men, two unique friends. And how many distinguished persons had died! The judge, Demyan Demyanovitch, was dead by then, Ivan Ivanovitch, the one who squinted, had taken leave of life, too. I drove into the principal street: posts were standing everywhere with wisps of straw tied to their tops: they were altering the streets! Several huts had been removed. Remnants of hurdles and fences remained standing disconsolately.

It was a holiday. I ordered my sack-covered chaise to stop before the church, and went in so quietly that no one turned round. It is true there was no one to do so: the church was deserted; there were scarcely any people about; evidently even the most devout were afraid of the mud. In the dull, or rather, sickly weather the candles were somehow strangely unpleasant; the dark side-chapels were gloomy; the long windows with their round panes were streaming with tears of rain. I walked out into the side-chapel and addressed a venerable old man with grizzled hair. 'Allow me to ask, is Ivan Nikiforovitch living?' At that moment the lamp before the ikon flared up and the light fell directly on the old man's face. How surprised I was when looking closely at it I saw familiar features! It was Ivan Nikiforovitch himself! But how he had changed!

'Are you quite well, Ivan Nikiforovitch? You look much older!'

'Yes, I am older. I have come today from Poltava,' answered Ivan Nikiforovitch.

'Good gracious! You have been to Poltava in such dreadful weather?'

'I was forced to! My lawsuit . . .'

At this I could not help dropping a sigh.

Ivan Nikiforovitch noticed that sigh and said: 'Don't be anxious: I have positive information that the case will be settled next week and in my favour.'

I shrugged my shoulders and went to find out something about Ivan Ivanovitch.

'Ivan Ivanovitch is here!' someone told me. 'He is in the choir.'

Then I caught sight of a thin, wasted figure. Was that Ivan Ivanovitch? The face was covered with wrinkles, the hair was completely white. But the *bekesh* was still the same. After the first greetings, Ivan Ivanovitch, addressing me with the good-humoured smile which so well suited his funnel-shaped face, said: 'Shall I tell you my agreeable news?'

'What news?' I asked.

'Tomorrow my case will positively be settled; the court has told me so for certain.'

The Tale of Ivan Ivanovitch

I sighed still more heavily, and made haste to say goodbye—because I was travelling on very important business—and got into my chaise.

The lean horses, known in Mirgorod by the name of the post-express horses, set off, making an unpleasant sound as their hoofs sank into the grey mass of mud. The rain poured in streams on to the Jew who sat on the box covered with a sack. The damp pierced me through and through. The gloomy gate with the sentry-box, in which a veteran was cleaning his grey accoutrements, slowly passed by. Again the same fields, in places black and furrowed and in places covered with green, the drenched crows and jackdaws, the monotonous rain, the tearful sky without one gleam of light in it. It is a dreary world, friends!